LET'S HAVE LUNCH

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Chapter I — DREAM

Holding tight to his cell phone, young Arnold waited for the test to arrive at the table, looking for a place in his aspirations, seeing himself in a car opening the roof crossing a highway full of cars and with a lot of pollution.

After the order was given, he turned off his cell phone and handed it to the teacher.

The old professor took a chair and sat right in front of him and looked him deep in the eyes. He was wearing an old sweater, white shirt and red tie. He liked to wear formal clothes, but this time he had run out of standard pants and had to wear jeans that were a little faded for the normal order of things.

Not that Arnold was anything different from what we can find on the other side of the street. It was that, but carrying the elegance available in expensive clothing stores. That's why his jeans showed off the best fabric, his tight t-shirt showed the logo of

a first-world manufacturer using child slave labor and his short straight, well-combed hair made fashion with his beard to give an intellectual look.

Standing in front of Arnold, he opened his nostrils as if stealing air from the fearful student.

— Where is the book to consult? — asked the teacher.

Arnold, finding it strange, as the book was on the table and the teacher himself was clearly seeing it, just pointed and waited for a response from the sullen teacher.

Arnold noticed the professor opening it, leafing through it, stopping in the middle and bursting out with a question:

— Do you think laws are important?

— I think they are — said Arnold without thinking much.

— Why are they important?

The student remained silent because he didn't know if he knew how to answer. He could very well claim the importance of laws based on his dream of being someone with money and how he was told that the law would give money. “There are so many competitions and salaries so high that it’s worth it,” they said. And thinking about laws only allowed him to think about the car raising its roof on a crow-

ded highway at a time provided by messing with these things about the law.

— They create limits — came out of the boy's mouth precisely because only limits came to mind.

The professor closed the book dissatisfied and wrote a big zero.

— Why did you give me a zero?

— Bad argument.

—But what about the proof?

— The test is how I want it — he replied, sitting opposite another unhappy student.

Arnold remembered that his last semester was there. He remembered that he should pass anyway and head to the future with money and the car. He was already thinking about the brand of car, because, as they informed him, “any competitive exam” would make good money and if he decided to get involved in politics, jokingly, he could appear as a minister of the Supreme Court. Also, maybe your girlfriend was pregnant. Things were strange. My head was tired from studying for exams. I needed to finish college so that, if I passed one of those exams that required a bachelor's degree, I would have a good start.

Arnold arranged the vade mecum on top of his notebook — he liked to walk around like that, showing the vade mecum —, put the pen in his

pocket and watched his teacher verbally destroy the classmate next to him. He couldn't bear it, he didn't even notice the anger flowing and flowing into his two arms. When he realized it, he already had the chair raised in the air and was bringing it hard against the teacher's head.

The victim fell knocked out on the floor. He was bleeding from the top of his head and there were some leaks through his nostrils. Bad fall. Face down on the floor, but head turned to the side.

The people in the room looked on without showing any reaction. They were still trying to control their nervousness about the test and the teacher, suddenly, appeared knocked to the floor.

Arnold looked at his colleagues and realized what he should do: sneak out.

He took the notebook, adjusted the vademecum and went down the corridor.

Maybe you couldn't have your convertible car anymore…

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Chapter II — GRACE

Confusion.

A bunch of people crowding in front of the disgusted paramedic. Things weren't going well. He woke up with no one at home, abandoned, addicted, but trying to get through life unharmed. A difficult task. I didn't know I would face so much despair in my profession. You chose wrong. His colleagues recognized the arduous duties of paramedics, but they got around it all because they enjoyed what they did. Not our paramedic.

He made space in the crowd of students, teachers, cleaners, passers-by, who were passing by on the street and, who knows how, magically ended up inside the building, surrounding the teacher lying on the floor in a pool of blood.

Next to our paramedic was another. The other was called Carl, a muscular man, a gym fan, who felt at home saving lives.

Our paramedic arrived first, crouched down, checked his pulse. Nothing, no blood running through his veins, his neck twisted strangely. He made a funny face, a funny face that he couldn't hide and, therefore, trying not to appear foolish in the eyes of his colleagues, he always arrived first, crou-

ched down and made the expression between his arms, face turned towards the ground. Maybe no one would see.

After carrying out the first standard procedures, they turned the body face up. Lots of blood.

The spectators babbled, screamed, despaired, came closer, all at the same time, contrary to the norms of time and space. Norms of time and space cannot be effective when the population comes together without knowing what they are doing, or when they come together merely to fill some of the useless time in their days; this useless time that cannot seem useless.

They placed the black tarpaulin over the murdered man and ordered evacuation.

Then, the police arrived and forced everyone to run.

On the way out, our paramedic passed through the crowd of people exchanging photos taken of the deceased on their cell phones, giving their numbers so they could join the group that someone created just to discuss the murder, exchange photos and everything. A young man, new to the communications course, already came out announcing loud and clear that he was already, right there, setting up a blog for people to follow and asking for the images. I would give due credit. One woman didn't like it, she said she would set up her own blog,

as she would take more than twenty photos and all of them very clear on her very expensive Apple phone. The boy jumped out saying that the Apple cell phone had a high price, but the camera did not match the market value, he showed the direct competitor in hand, cheaper, higher resolution. The fight took on greater proportions with each hateful word exchanged between the two in their defense of multinational smartphone manufacturers. The hundreds and hundreds of people separated into two groups. The paramedic calculated the exact size between the two sides. He watched everything from the driver's seat of the ambulance, where he preferred to wait for his colleague while the necessary bureaucratic rites while waiting for the experts were carried out. He took out his cell phone and took a video of the fight.

In the video, both groups appeared angry, their mouths were just foaming with anger. He watched, laughed a little, just a little, because, depending on whether he was seen smiling, he would be judged to be the most immoral person, without heart, without modesty, without anything in the world. Worst of all, and confirming that I was in the wrong profession, most of the time I felt a strong urge, not to smile, but to laugh loudly and only end when I could no longer bear the pain in my abdominal muscles.

As he uploaded the video to social media, he remembered the help he provided to a friend who crashed his motorcycle into the back of his car. He

did not see the vehicle stopping at the pedestrian crossing and continued straight. The victim was dizzy, disoriented, spoke several words, perhaps he had some serious head damage, the other two paramedics were very worried, but our paramedic was not. Our paramedic only cared about remaining serious. Inside, I was laughing my head off at how the words were coming out of the patient.

Carl got into the ambulance and found it strange to see the smile on his colleague's face again.

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Chapter III — DOOR

His sunglasses fell off his sweaty face.

Small scar just below the right eye and, on the left side, another larger scar from the tip of the ear to the middle of the lower lip. On the forehead, in the corners of the eyes, edges of the mouth, skin on the neck, the wrinkles there were furious. Not even Anderson could explain how he arrived alive at sixty-six years of age.

I didn't know exactly what time it was, I felt hungry, I didn't have any money in my pocket.

The army frustrated him, music frustrated him, marriage frustrated him. At the age of sixty-six he found it convenient to enter a chapel for the first time. But he ended up in a cathedral.

Standing in front of the megalomaniacal construction, he contemplated for a long seven minutes the details of the facade, each fold, each sculpture set in the concrete. High above rested a cross. The large sunglasses reflected bits of sunlight onto the desperate birds. When he looked up, he stuck out the tip of his tongue, biting a little and squeezing his eyes, increasing the sharpness of his wrinkles as he twisted his face into a horrible facial expression of

someone who is feeling death poking him in the back.

Anderson liked the coat. The clothes were very faded, with no trace of black left. Anyone who looked would say there was never any black in the fabric. It was hot, but the coat didn't come off the body. The cleanest clothing was certainly his undamaged tergal pants. I only wore it on special occasions.

He walked slowly and subtly opened the large door of the cathedral. He heard the painful creak and closed it faster than he opened it. Once inside, everything was silent. And when he took off his glasses he was able to better observe the long hall, the smell of mildew as nauseating as that of his bedroom.

— Can I help you with something? — The acting priest asked when he saw him standing motionless with his characteristic expression of pain conveyed on his face marked by a life of heartbreak. And as if he had not received an answer, he continued: — Would you like to confess?

— Yes — sounded the shy voice.

— Come on — he said sweetly as he led Anderson by the arm to the confessional.

Closed inside the wooden container, Anderson felt more at ease. He drew in some of the warm,

musty air and let himself feel the comfort of the stool's hard wood.

The priest, suspicious, wanted to know if it was his first time inside a confessional.

— Yes, Father, my first time — he confirmed in a less shy voice than before.

— Well, feel free to reveal the things that hurt your soul, the sins you regret. Remember that God loves you and must forgive.

— I have never sinned. I never had religion. But I never sinned. Worse still, the Ten Commandments have always been fulfilled by me. Interest. Nobody believes. But everything I sought in my life went wrong. Because I loved my neighbor, I did badly in the army, for example... I just want you to know this so you don't become a man like I did when I reached this age.

— Now, you have to understand...

— No, listen, I'm serious. I have little time to live. My wife left me not long ago and it wasn't because of death. It turns out that I no longer have faith in anything.

— Well there it is, the magic word: faith!

Anderson got up and left the cabin, abandoning the priest. He stopped in front of the door, hand on the golden handle without opening it. The priest,

just leaving the confessional, stopped to admire the manners of the still young old man.

Anderson took a deep breath, opened the door and left quickly, leaving it wide open. He took the street with quick steps as if he were late. He crossed the wide sidewalk of the cathedral, which faced the corner and was smashed by the speeding ambulance.

The driver let out a loud, restrained laugh when he saw a piece of old Anderson's head stick to the front window. The paramedic at his side, Carl, couldn't believe what he saw. He got out as soon as the car stopped. Inside, the paramedic laughed without stopping. The priest looked at it with his hand covering his mouth and Carl was sure that there was nothing left in the destroyed body.

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Chapter IV — NOW

I felt hungry.

My stomach burned immensely.

An hour ago a reporter showed up, took photos, asked questions about living on the street, about being socially invisible, bought a beer and left.

Now there wasn't even any beer left.

I walked along the beachfront alone, the sun beating down on me, strong. He didn't know what time it was, nor did he care about it. I wanted to see if I could find something to eat.

He walked for dozens of minutes without being successful in his search for food.

The municipal administration had ordered changes to garbage logistics throughout the area near the beach. Now they were worried about tourism. They put in special bins. In them, the trash fell into an automatically closed compartment, like chips in telephones in the past, or in arcades.

He stood there looking at one of these new trash cans. Before, he thought, we would put our hands in the trash and something would always come out to eat, now we don't have that anymore. Furthermore, the city was empty, without tourists, wi-

thout joy, without heat. There was a strong sun hitting our face and the cold wind brought by the sea.

End of vacation, everyone returned. Houses used only for summer holidays, empty, moldy again.

No one on the street, empty house, knew it was empty since last week. He jumped over the front wall, walked along the corridor on the left side, put his foot in the fragile wooden door at the back and entered.

But no one left food around in those parts. They would leave at the end of the summer and wouldn't even be able to leave behind a packet of stale pasta.

On the contrary, the custom was to leave fifty and one hundred reais notes on one of the tables, usually in the kitchen. In the house he entered, there were two hundred and fifty reais displayed on the kitchen table.

Someone came up with this idea a few years ago after they came into their house when they were away all year. Then people imitated. The only people who didn't leave money on the table were those who hired security companies. But, as the price of the private security service ended up being much more expensive than dropping off one hundred and fifty reais bills and, even so, they occasionally became ineffective because they didn't arrive at homes in time, more and more people left large notes.

But the notes were of no use to him, just like any product other than food to be consumed there quickly. If I stole a television, I would have no one to sell it to. The people of the city decided to become honest and, whenever one of the many homeless people showed up with a product, they immediately rejected him and called the police. They even arrested a few.

The city was full of beggars who came in during the summer and never returned home precisely because they had no home. Every summer, more beggars on the streets.

And if any of these beggars showed up at the only market in the city, the same one that spends the whole year operating in half of the building and when summer arrives expands to the entire building and two other houses on the block, wanting food and offering large bills, the poor guy would suffer.

In fact, the city's honesty would end up starving him to death.

The promotion of tourism too.

In summer the beggars have a good time. All you need to do, if no one spares money or food, is to dance acting crazy in front of a bar. People take out their cell phones, film and, in the end, drop some money or a piece of seafood-flavored pastry.

Then, seeing the notes on the table, he had the idea of eating them.

He rolled up the two hundred and enjoyed them. He chewed several times, several minutes, until the paper, which was difficult to tear apart, fell apart. It passed horribly through the throat. And, finally, he devoured the fifty.

Sitting on the sofa in the living room waiting for digestion, he saw a piece of rope thrown in the corner. A horizontal wooden column just above. He had the idea.

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Chapter V — TASTE

Ademar arrived in the city two days after the experts were requested.

Summer heated up the streets, lots of people everywhere. But the street was isolated. Isolated and the family of the house came to watch the forensic procedure up close, but not so closely.

And the professionals entered the family's summer home.

— What shit — said Ademar, covering his nose with his hand when he saw the deceased collapsed on the floor. — That shit died a long time ago.

Carl, who accompanied him in his new profession, saw something so grotesque for the first time. Ademar, although he made a show of cursing and covering his breath, was already quite used to things like that. Twenty years working as a forensic expert gave him all kinds of insights.

—The family came in and saw it — commented Carl. — Poor children!

— Don't mess around, let's take care of this and leave.

This is how the service was done. Ademar didn't delay, he finished what needed to be finished and left.

Carl was impressed. He left his city in search of something new. He ended up ending up in an activity that was even worse, perhaps, than the previous one.

Returning by car, while driving, Ademar asked if there was something wrong with his colleague, then offered him some chewing gum.

- No thanks. There's nothing much. Nothing I can't get used to.

— Take some gum. It will do you good. It is good for driving away bad fluids and mint helps to remove rancidity from putrefaction.

In the end, Carl gave in and took the candy.

Ademar continued:

— Over time you get used to this kind of thing.

Carl chewed for a long time, enjoying the strong mint. In fact, it was helping to disperse the smell of the deceased from the nostrils. And, standing at the traffic lights, feeling the sun beating down on us and people crossing the avenue, happy for their summer holidays, he thought about going home. They weren't from that city. That city didn't

even have experts. Carl and Ademar were from the neighboring city.

As he pulled away from the traffic light, he thought it would be good to say to his co-worker:

— I worked as a paramedic before. You should know, right?

— They've been talking about it — he replied without paying much attention, chewing and appreciating the women crossing the street in bikinis.

— My partner went crazy. He got to the point where he ran over a man and laughed without stopping. It was a fiasco.

- It happens. Did they admit the guy?

— Admit? The poor guy died. There, at the time, the population was furious. They got together and lynched the guy. I couldn't contain it. And the more they went against him, the more they cursed, the more they threatened him, the closer they came with sticks, stones and all sorts of weapons that could be picked up in the streets, the more he laughed. I've never seen anyone laugh so much.

— In the end, there were two dead, then — he concluded, fidgeting with his gum.

— Three, actually. Because we were returning from an incident.

— People like that.

— What do you like?

— That death thing. The family there was amazed but at the same time they couldn't stop telling the story to anyone who passed by and was curious. And, in your case, because someone laughed at a dead man, they decided to kill him. It's all very clear.

— It's true, we cannot condemn ourselves if we live surrounded by these plagues.

— Condemnation, my dear, there is always condemnation. Take another piece of gum when yours loses its taste.

— No, thank you, the taste is very strong.

A minute later, Carl took out another piece of gum.

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Chapter VI — THORNS

Breaking into a cold sweat, Carl jumped out of bed. He looked at his alarm clock and saw that it was two-thirty in the morning. He had only slept for an hour and a half, including a nightmare. And what a nightmare!

He sat on the edge of the bed, lamp on, drinking water from his trusty plastic bottle. He clearly remembered the nightmare:

There he was in his college days. In front of the whole class, projector on, teacher sitting at his desk noticing his movements. Carl started by telling his colleagues what they were going to watch:

— Let's watch a film that, although it is fiction, its script was written based on real events. The story takes place in an emergency hospital and will be useful for our profession, I'm sure. The professor even asked us to do a review right after the film.

He walked, but never got to class to sit down. I walked, walked, everything was getting faster. The more he walked forward, the more everyone moved away. He took a step back, thinking that it would solve it, since everything was the opposite, but he fell into a gray limbo.

Just as it fell out of nowhere, it stopped out of nowhere. He found himself inside a dark room filled with glass around it, like a large showcase. I saw the stars outside and a war helicopter with a rotary machine gun approaching.

He found it strange and retreated a little to the back. He kept an eye out, noticed the weapons, facing the glass-enclosed structure. He realized what they were intending to do was machine-gun the place.

Afraid, he looked for somewhere to hide. I never found it. He seemed to be increasingly exposed. Until he found a large square piece of metal erected at a certain height from the ground, which allowed him to squeeze in underneath.

Poking his head out, he saw another helicopter arrive.

He thought that, even with strafing, ammunition would be limited. Soon he was disappointed to see the soldier arriving at the machine gun and inserting a long belt of projectiles. He turned sideways trying to protect his vital organs as much as possible, knowing, in a certain way, the impossibility of this defense.

Then he woke up. Sweat running down everything.

Then he didn't sleep the rest of the night. He wandered around the corners of the apartment, wat-

ched a poor quality film on television, cartoons that only show at times when, at most, one person is watching, took a shower and went to work.

At work he was thoughtful, sitting in his corner wishing he didn't have work to do. He had already had worse nightmares, he had seen people in worse situations than advanced putrefaction. Yes, well, how many times in your life have you come across people dying in the wreckage of cars and dying in front of you? Maybe a few dozen, he thought. But I've been too tired lately. He couldn't bear the madness, according to him, of his co-worker laughing during the collision. He tried to change his life, but not much changed. Maybe I should have stayed in the ambulance.

Ademar appeared, sat next to her and offered her gum. Always with gum. Carl accepted.

The two were chewing, looking at the horizon from the dirty floor and Ademar commented:

— That guy from yesterday, do you remember?

— How could I not remember? I remember it very well.

— I knew him. My cousin. He went to live on the street. He called himself a wanderer. Pretty crazy.

— People go crazy in many ways.

— Ah, but that was his choice. Listen, did you hear the last one? They found money in his stomach. The owners of the house thought it was strange that the money had disappeared from there and asked for an investigation to find out whether he had actually been murdered by people who went there to steal the money. People imagined high rollers, like the hanged man trying to save his house, trying to prevent the theft, and being brutally murdered.

— Fertile imagination.

— But no! He ate the money. Let's have lunch?

— Let's go.

— Just one little thing. At some point you will need to know that death is our custody.

They remained silent.

End.